

A close-up photograph of a person's face and neck. The person has long, straight, light brown hair. They are wearing a white collared shirt and a dark blue necktie. A white fleur-de-lis symbol is superimposed over the tie. The text "SAINT HELEN" is written in a white, serif font across the middle of the image.

SAINT HELEN

by
Alessa

Saint Helen

by Alessa

It was any other day at the frozen yoghurt shop.

It was a meaningless, simple existence. I worked at the yoghurt shop every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday after my junior classes at the university. I served sweetly tart yet overpriced yoghurt that came in colourful flavours. I sprinkled fresh, delicious toppings, and I argued with my coworker about the fact we couldn't play his Death Metal music on the speakers because we couldn't have songs like *Slit Your Guts* and *Corpse Explosion* playing in a friggin' frozen yoghurt shop.

It was just past three in the afternoon on that fateful Friday. I was wiping the counter for the *n*-th time in boredom when *she* came in.

By she, I mean perfection in human form. Eurydice would have ditched Orpheus and gone gay for her—if she wasn't already. You could never know with those ancient Greeks. Botticelli would have looked at Venus and thought, '*What was I smoking last night?*' That was all the reference material I had, since that was all I paid attention to during my sophomore History class. Basically—gosh damn, she was *hot*!

She had a small smile on her face as her warm hazel eyes looked around our colourful frozen yoghurt shop. She was wearing a high school uniform, and beneath the school emblem I read '*St. Helen's High School for Girls*'. I instantly noticed from the school name that she was studying at the local high school—something that lifted my hope of seeing her in the shop more than once.

I wanted to run my hand through her thick, black hair. I wanted to feel what those cheekbones felt like underneath my thumbs, and I wanted to see the light scattering of freckles on the bridge of her button nose up close.

I wanted to do a lot of things to her, and I subsequently wanted her to do a lot of things to me—many that I couldn't possibly dare say aloud without being called a pervert, so the only thing I ended up doing was letting out a high squeak right before I ducked behind the counter. I pulled my knees close to my chest and looked around for my coworker. *Where was he?*

"Wilson!" I hissed. He was a few feet away from me, refilling the cup of blueberry toppings as he hummed some demonic tune he liked.

Wilson studied at the same university I did, but he was a freshman, so by default, he was idiotic and below me.

He still wasn't paying attention to me, so I pulled one of my sneakers off my foot and threw it at him. It hit him just below the knee. "*Wilson!*"

"*What?*" he finally hissed back, turning his head back to look at me, still holding the jar of blueberries and the teaspoon in his other hand.

For a while, we just glared at each other in vehement silence before I jerked a thumb over my shoulder. I motioned to the counter. "Take the order!"

"It's your turn at the counter—"

"Wilson!"

"I'm not—"

"*Wilson!*"

"*Fine!*"

He twisted the lid back onto the jar and set the teaspoon down before heading to the counter, making sure to kick my shoe farther away from my reach on his way there. He stopped right beside me, and he cleared his throat before saying, "Hey, good morning! Welcome to Twisted Berries. What'll you be having?"

The girl paused for a second. "Hmm... Can I have... a medium-sized, plain yoghurt?"

Oh, what a voice!

"Sure," Wilson said, automatically taking one medium-sized cup from the stack. "What toppings would you like?"

"Hmmm..." the girl mused, and because I was hiding behind the counter, I unfortunately couldn't see what she was doing. I pictured her leaning over the glass box that displayed the row of toppings, her sparse eyebrows crinkled in thought, and a slightly embarrassed smile on her face. I heard her chuckle, and my skin tingled. "To be honest, this is my first time here, so I'm not quite sure."

I sighed. How honest of her to admit that. *You can be the toppings on my yoghurt any day*, I thought, in that completely not-sexual-but-kinda-pervy way paired with a coy growl.

My raunchy little thought bubble burst when I felt the back of Wilson's sneaker jab my side. My hand shot up to cover my mouth when it hit me—I had actually said it out loud!

Oh, dear God.

Fortunately, there were times when Wilson was not so idiotic, so he quickly tried to cover up for me by clearing his throat and forcing an easy laugh. "Oh, uh, what was that? I think a bird hit the window. Oh, what was I saying? Don't worry about it; choose anything you like."

I waited for the girl to respond, but she took a while to answer. I spread my arms out and pressed myself as flat as I could against the counter. Oh, dear Lord. She heard me. She heard me. Oh, God. She heard me. Any moment she was going to set her hands on the counter and look down and—

"I'll have... a dash of maple syrup, peaches, and almonds."

I nearly slumped against the counter in relief when I realised she'd see my legs if I did, so I kept my knees pressed against me. I kept still as Wilson finished her order, got her money, gave her change, and only got up when I heard her leave.

Slowly, I rose from my hiding spot and set my hands on the edge of the counter, peeking just above it to make sure she wasn't there anymore. Unfortunately, there was a little kid standing right in front of me, ready to take his order, but I shooed him away in the hopes I could still see the girl's retreating back. But no, she was gone. Stupid kid.

"She's gone."

I looked up at Wilson. "I know. I was just checking."

He rolled his eyes at me, and any other time I would have rolled my eyes back at him, and he would have said something snarky like "You're such a perv, Clarice", and I would have said something snarky back like "It takes one to know one", but it wasn't any other time.

That day was when I first met—or, well, saw—Saint Helen, the name derived from the emblem on her school uniform, and also because I thought if I was going to worship someone, then sainthood would be the minimum requirement.

And it was on that day that I began my downward spiral of meaningless sex, alcoholism, violence, self-destruction, and... okay, not really. But it felt close to something like that because one just doesn't fall in love with a high school girl without losing one's sanity beforehand.



Since I am quite an observant girl and borderline obsessive to the point I should be in my own *Girl, Interrupted* (or so Wilson said), it didn't take long for me to figure out Saint Helen's schedule. She would come to our shop every Friday at around three, order a medium-sized plain yoghurt with maple syrup, peaches, and almond toppings, drop her change into our Trevor Project donation box, then leave.

She always ordered it to go, but I really hoped that she'd have her yoghurt in the shop, just so I could see the way she ate it. I'm a good girl. It's not that I get turned on at the sight of schoolgirls inserting things into their mouth—*REALLY, I DON'T!* – it's more like I wanted to see... bits of her personality, I guess. There wasn't much I could see or know about her when I was hiding behind a counter whenever she dropped by, right?

Did she mix the yoghurt and the toppings together before eating? Or did she take bits of the toppings one at a time? Did she take huge spoonfuls and stuff them in her mouth? Did she eat her yoghurt slowly and suck the tip of the plastic spoon to savour every bit of the sweet and tangy taste?

Knowing her pattern, it didn't take long for me to adjust mine. I would get to the shop at 1 p.m. after my classes like usual, I'd take orders, clean up the tables, and make funny faces at kids whenever they

were looking over their parents' shoulders, but at exactly 2:58, I'd duck behind a counter while Wilson got Saint Helen's order.

On a particular Friday, I was leaning against the counter while I did my accounting homework. My head was propped up against my hand, and I was so engrossed in my cash flow statements that I didn't realise the time.

"It's 2:59," Wilson said beside me.

I looked up at the clock, and my eyes instantly flicked to the door as I heard the chimes above it ring. I grabbed my notebook and my calculator, and I fled to the storeroom where they kept all the toppings and the yoghurt machine. I pressed my back against the wall and closed my eyes as I heard the front door close. *That was close.*

I turned around, and it dawned on me that I wasn't leaning on a wall but on a tinted window. I could see everything from the outside, but someone from the outside would just see a dark pane of glass.

In other words... a light bulb practically lit up on top of my head.

My beautiful Saint Helen opened the door for a woman and her baby—*what a girl!*—and on her way to the counter, her hazel eyes turned directly towards me.

I froze. "Holy—"

Fortunately, my reflexes kicked in, and I ducked, my breathing fast, my heart racing wildly. I closed my hand into a fist and beat it against my chest, hoping to calm my heart from exploding.

Wait.

It was a tinted window. What was I thinking?

I told myself to relax. It wasn't like she saw me. It was just a coincidence. She was probably just glancing at her reflection in the window. Hey, if I were half as good-looking as she was, I would too.

I stayed where I was and tried to regain control of my breathing. I picked off a yellow banana from its bundle and was starting to peel it when Saint Helen spoke.

"Are you the only one working during this shift?" she asked Wilson.

My hand froze in its place, my fingers still holding onto the tip of the banana peel. Why was she asking? I took a bite of the banana and gulped it down.

She didn't see you. She didn't see you.

Slowly, I turned around and got back to my feet so I could watch what was happening.

"What?" Wilson asked. He quickly glanced my way.

He paused for a bit...

A little bit longer...

Then laughed.

I wanted to chuck the banana at him, but I knew it would compromise my position.

Wilson turned back to Saint Helen and shook his head. "No. It just looks like I'm the only one, but there are actually two of us on this shift."

"Oh," Saint Helen said, nodding slowly as she looked around. She chuckled. "I only really see you, so I thought they were cost-cutting or something."

Wilson laughed some more because it was so very funny. "No, no. Clarice, my co-worker, is just extremely lazy. She smokes hashish in the backroom while daydreaming about seducing girls your age. You see, she's an incurable pervert."

That was it! Wilson was definitely going to get a banana in his face when I got out of the storeroom.

Luckily, Saint Helen was smart enough not to believe the words of the idiotic freshman. She laughed, though, not long and artificially, but with more of a genuine chuckle, and I really wished at that point that I could just shove Wilson away and pretend that Saint Helen was laughing at something I had just said.

She ordered her usual order, but before paying, she paused as she pulled her phone out of her jacket pocket. "Oh, I'll just get this," she said, smiling as she stepped away from the counter.

Since she had her back to the counter and was out of hearing distance, I poked my head from the store room door. "*Psst... Wilson!*"

He turned around just as he was about to sprinkle the toppings on the yoghurt cup. "What now?"

I quickly motioned for him to come over. "Come here."

"Why—"

"Come here!"

"What if I don't want—"

"*Wilson!*"

He rolled his eyes at me in the '*you're-a-sad-excuse-for-a-human-being*' kind of way and walked towards the store room. I yanked him inside and grabbed the yoghurt cup from his hand.

"What are you doing *now*?"

"I'm putting the toppings on," I muttered. I pulled a fresh banana from its bundle and sliced it. I opened the refrigerator where they kept the fresh fruits and pulled out some blackberries. I opened the jar of almond slices. I sprinkled each ingredient into the yoghurt cup, ignoring the way Wilson was raising his eyebrow at me.

"You're adding more than the assigned amount."

"I know that."

"They're gonna take that out of your salary."

"Thanks for stating the obvious, Wilson."

He sighed loudly and turned his head to look out the tinted window. "Hurry up. Your little schoolgirl is already there."

"Shut up and help me!"

I turned my head and looked over my shoulder just as I was sprinkling the last bits of almonds. Saint Helen was leaning forward, looking side to side to find out where Wilson was. Oh man, that confused look on her little face was so *adorable*. I wiped my hands on my apron and handed the yoghurt cup back to Wilson. "There. Take it to her."

He rolled his eyes at me once more, just to emphasise what a shameless deviant I was, before leaving the storeroom. When he moved back to the counter, he managed to put a smile on his face. "Sorry about that. I just got fresher ingredients for you."

"Oh, no problem," Saint Helen said stoically. She handed Wilson her money, and when Wilson handed her order, I noticed the way her hazel eyes widened just a bit. Butterflies bloomed in my stomach just watching the little ways she reacted to things. "Wow, this is more than usual!"

"Yeah, err," Wilson said, his eyes glancing towards me for a split second. "We accidentally ordered a bit too much fruit. We need to use a lot of our ingredients so... uh, we don't have any leftovers."

"Really?" Saint Helen's smile was so wide. Beautiful, straight, white teeth. And, dear Lord, I think I saw a dimple. She glanced down at the yoghurt cup and smiled to herself. "I guess I'm a lucky girl."

When she left, my face was practically pressed flat against the storeroom window. My breathing even made the tinted glass fog up.

She was turning me into an obsessive stalker, *and* she was making me lose money.

Be still, my beating heart.



Even though I was losing nearly five dollars a week due to all the toppings I lavished on her yoghurt, I didn't really care. Maybe I was obsessed. Maybe I was in love. Maybe I was a pervert, like Wilson said. I didn't know. But I was sure that it was those excess toppings that made her come back every week instead of dropping by many of the other yoghurt shops sprouting on our street. And if five dollars was what needed to be sacrificed for her to drop by the shop, I was more than ready to give it up.

Fortunately, as the weeks passed by, Wilson gave up on telling me I was a pervert or telling me that I needed to be locked up or at least seek professional help. He didn't protest anymore and even went

along with my act. He made up different excuses just so he could go to the storeroom and let me add my extra toppings.

It was any other Friday, and I was adding the blackberries to Saint Helen's yoghurt when Wilson yawned. He was leaning against the storeroom door, checking his watch.

"I don't see why you can't just go out and talk to her yourself. Maybe she needs someone to tutor her in math or finger painting or whatever it is kids her age need help with."

I rolled my eyes at him as I reached for the jar of almonds. I glanced at Saint Helen. She was leaning against the counter, her hazel eyes reading through our overhead menu. I turned back to my semi-idiotic, still-below-me freshman coworker.

"Uh, hello? The reason I stay here is that I can watch her without soiling her sainthood with the knowledge of my existence. Jeez, Wilson."

Wilson raised an eyebrow as he handed me the jar of almonds.

"...What?" I rolled my eyes and pointed at the window with the teaspoon I was holding. "Wilson. A tinted window equals a perfect hiding spot," I explained, like he was a five-year-old. "I see her; she can't see me. Do I need to make it—"

"Uh, those aren't tinted windows."

I nearly dropped the jar of almonds I was holding. Luckily, I quickly realised that if I broke it, I'd have to pay for it. If I added that expense to the money I was already losing because of the extra toppings, I wouldn't be earning anything anymore. My voice grew small and I felt myself growing smaller and smaller. "...What?"

Wilson looked at me like I was the idiotic one. "Not all dark panes of glass are tinted, you know."

He paused as he let that little, insignificant detail sink into my already liquidating mind.

"She can see you just as much as you can see her."



I stopped working at the shop on Fridays.

I thought about quitting the job altogether, but I still needed the cash to buy... food... tampons... and stuff. You know, to try to pretend the life was still worth living... but really, I was too embarrassed to function.

I kept replaying it over and over in my mind. How stupid I must have looked, how I hadn't even bothered to fix my hair; how I probably had lettuce stuck between my teeth that time I had a salad for lunch; how obsessed I must have looked with my face pressed against the glass as I stared at her. I

knocked my fist against my head and tried to forget about it, but I couldn't. The poor kid probably thinks I'm some kind of pervert now. Hell, even I think I might have taken this too far.

Wilson spent the next couple of weeks laughing at me and sharing the story with fellow customers. Apparently, it was quite funny. Some punk kid wanted to make a Facebook page just for me, and another fangirl wanted to draw a Yuri manga of me making out with Saint Helen. I threatened that if they did, instead of blackberries, I'd sprinkle cat droppings from the cat that likes lying on the roof of the shop and mating every other night. How I was going to do that, they didn't need to know.

I didn't know how long I had been wiping the white countertop when Wilson cleared his throat. "If you keep on wiping that, the paint's gonna come off."

I blinked just before I looked up at him. I looked down at what I had been wiping. "I swear, I thought there was chocolate syrup here."

"Yeah, there was." Wilson pushed himself off the counter he was leaning on and started fixing the stack of yoghurt cups. "Ten minutes ago."

My shoulders fell. "Oh."

He was done arranging the cups by height when he spoke again. "I need you to be here on Friday night."

I rolled my eyes at him. "You know, I don't work here on Fridays anymore."

"Yeah, but there won't be anyone else in the shop."

"Why?" I scoffed, chucking the wet rag over my shoulder and into the sink. "What are you gonna do on a Friday night that's so important that you'd have to take a day off?"

"I'm going out on a date."

I was in the middle of continuing my snarky tirade when I stopped mid-sentence. "...*What?*"

"I," Wilson fixed a smug look on his face. He waggled his eyebrows and puffed his chest. "Have a date for Valentine's Day."

Oh, so it was Valentine's Day on—

Wait.

Oh, dear Lord.

Wilson had a date on Valentine's Day.

Wilson.

Wilson.

The guy who didn't even *like* frozen yoghurt and yet still worked in a frozen yoghurt shop. The guy who dressed up as Jason from *Friday the 13th* for Halloween and made us lose half a week's revenue

because no kid wanted to step in the store. The guy who—gah, that just proved it. I was definitely living a very sad life.

I gaped at him like a fish. "I... I..."

"It won't be that bad," Wilson said, rolling his eyes at me as he walked over to the counter. He kept his back to me as he continued. "I'm sure *something's* gonna keep you entertained at some point."

Sure.

Maybe some kid will get an allergic reaction to almonds that I knew I wasn't supposed to put in, but because I was wallowing in misery, I totally forgot... Oh, man, I was thinking morbid thoughts about *kids*. I was at a new low.



Wilson and I agreed that I'd get to the shop at five, early enough for him to prepare for his date and, most importantly, late enough so I wouldn't have to see that... girl.

Yeah, look how great I am for moving on. I already forgot her—

Yeah. I'm lying.

Just as I had expected, nearly every person that entered the store that evening had either just come from a movie or a restaurant.

For about thirty times that night, I repeated the line our manager told me to say to every person who entered the store.

"Welcome to Twisted Berries! Happy Valentine's Day! We have a special mix just for today called Strawberry Swirl. It has strawberries and raspberries, finished with a honey glaze. Would you like to try it?"

Twenty-eight times out of thirty, couples said yes. I didn't get it. It wasn't even *that* great.

Okay, so it tasted really, really, really good... but come on. A little originality on Valentine's Day, people? You don't *have* to order the Valentine's special. We've got about thirty different toppings you could choose from.

It was nearing nine, and I was just about ready to close up shop. No one had ordered anything for the past ten minutes, so I took the time to do my accounting homework. I was in the middle of taking care of my merchandise inventory when I heard the chimes above the door ring. Darn, I was almost done.

"Welcome to Twisted Berries," I droned, finishing the rest of my inventory adjustment. If the manager was there, he would have scolded me for being inattentive—but what the heck. I was stuck in the shop

on Valentine's Day evening. Nearly every couple in the shop was sharing one large Valentine's special frozen yoghurt with those googley-couple-eyes as they fed each other honey-glazed strawberries.

No, I was not being bitter.

"Happy Valentine's Day," I started. "We have a special mix just for today called Strawberry Swirl. It has strawberries, raspberries, finished with a honey glaze. Would you like to try it?"

"No, thanks; I'll just have a plain yoghurt."

My pen stopped in the middle of my inventory shrinkage.

I stared down at my notebook, my eyes wide.

"I don't see you on Fridays anymore," she smiled, the cutest dimple showing on her cheek.

I didn't dare to look up as I mumbled, red colour painting my face, "What... what... what toppings... would you like?"

"You can be the toppings on my yoghurt any day."

The End